

Spokane Regional Health District **Media Relations Guidelines - July 2001 (Rev. 11/01)**

Overview

An important role of the Spokane Regional Health District is sharing information about public health. Specifically, it is the statutory responsibility of the Health Officer to "ensure the public is informed about the causes, nature and prevention of disease and disability; and preservation, promotion and improvement of health."

Over the years, the Health Officer and key employees have worked through a variety of essential community partners, including the local media, to accomplish this important educational outreach component. Past outreach through the media has been largely program-specific or reactive in nature.

In order to enhance the SRHD's relationships with our media partners, a Public Information Manager has been hired to fill this newly-created position. The purpose of the *Media Relations Guidelines* is to clarify roles and set forth protocol for working effectively with the media, to ensure the SRHD's messages and mission are well communicated to our primary audience -- the residents, elected officials and key decision-makers of Spokane County.

Objectives

In establishing guidelines for media relations, the following objectives have been established:

- Ensure all media contact is in compliance with the Board of Health's Media Policy, adopted June 22, 2000.
- Ensure Health District policy, programs and services are consistently, comprehensively and professionally communicated to the media.
- Initiate proactive communication with local media in matters of urgent, newsworthy and routine public health issues, including those of potential legal or political significance.
- Ensure media inquiries receive immediate response and information provided is accurate, appropriate and consistent.
- Train and position key representatives with the media as experts in their respective programs.
- Inform Board of Health and Health Officer of media contact, in compliance with Media Policy and guidelines set forth in this document.

Media Spokespersons

The Board of Health's Media Policy designates the Health Officer as primary media spokesperson. According to the policy, Dr. Thorburn "may delegate ongoing responsibility for media response to specifically designated staff who are directly involved in programs where fairly constant informational contact is necessary."

A group of specifically designated employees have been formally authorized to respond to media inquiries about program-related information, without prior notice to Dr. Thorburn. With the addition of Melanie Rose, the Public Information Manager, Dr. Thorburn has delegated ongoing responsibility for the District's media relations efforts to Melanie Rose, who will also serve as spokesperson, as appropriate.

Responding to media inquiries about matters of Health District policy (e.g. budget planning, funding, ballot issues, strategic initiatives, Board of Health decisions) and stories of community-wide significance (e.g. epidemics, disaster response, major collaborations) shall remain the sole responsibility of the Health Officer.

Proactive Media Activity

The Public Information Manager will coordinate all proactive media activity. This is necessary to ensure consistency, coordinate timing, enhance the image of the Spokane Regional Health District and allow employees to focus on their core program-related functions.

Proactive media activity includes any type of information prepared and communicated to the local media. Specific proactive media contact may include:

- News Release – issued at any time to communicate important newsworthy information to targeted or all local media
- Public Health Advisory – issued at least monthly about seasonal health issues that are important for public awareness, but not deemed “news”
- Community Calendar Advisory - issued to targeted media in advance of a public health event for publication on community event calendars
- Press Kit – materials prepared for the media, to provide additional background and information about a specific topic
- Press Conference/Special Community Event – special event planned and held to communicate highly important and/or visible information to the general community for which media coverage is desired
- Story Pitch (with message points) – story idea targeted to a specific reporter/media agency with community or news interest, where key points are prepared and used to pitch the story.

Proactive media activity will be coordinated through the Public Information Manager, as follows:

- All written announcements (e.g. News Release, Public Health Advisory, Community Calendar Advisory, Notices of Special Events, etc) will be written and distributed by the Public Information Manager, working closely with key program staff. Joint media announcements (in conjunction with community partners or coalitions) must be coordinated through the Public Information Manager, prior to release.

- Other types of information prepared for distribution to the media (e.g. press kits, fact sheets, etc) must be reviewed by the Public Information Manager prior to release, to ensure format, information and messages are consistent and appropriate.
- Special event coordination with the media (e.g. press conference, community events, etc) is the responsibility of the Public Information Manager. Events related to specific programs and health-related promotions are to be jointly coordinated with the Public Information Manager and appropriate program staff.
- Message points prepared to pitch stories to the local media will be prepared by the Public Information Manager, with input from appropriate program staff.

Reactive Response to Media Inquiries

All SRHD employees should read and be familiar with the Board of Health Media Policy (attached). In accordance with this policy and the delegation action of the Health Officer, ***all media inquiries should be immediately directed to the Public Information Manager.***

If the inquiry is received by an employee previously-designated to serve in the role of program-specific spokesperson (without prior approval), the protocol is:

1. Field the call and respond, as appropriate. Complete and submit a Media Contact form within 24 hours to the Public Information Manager.
2. If the reporter begins asking questions outside the program-specific area, transfer the call to the Public Information Manager (or appropriate external partnering agency) who will facilitate the remainder of the media inquiry.

Media Activity “In the Field”

Situations may arise where media is encountered outside the office, including:

- Community Meetings, Presentations or Training Courses - It is important for employees engaged in public speaking on behalf of SRHD to be aware of the possibility of media coverage and tailor remarks accordingly. It is usually not possible to anticipate media coverage and SRHD employees who find themselves in this situation should report the activity to the Public Information Manager, immediately upon return to the Health District.
- Media Request to Accompany Field Worker – All inquiries and requests by media to “ride along” with a SRHD employee outside the office must be facilitated by the Public Information Manager. The Public Information Manager will schedule the field event, coach the employee prior to the event and, when possible, will accompany the reporter and employee into the field. This protocol applies to all situations and employees, including those previously-designated to talk with the media.

Training

All SRHD employees designated to act as pre-approved program-specific spokespeople are to complete the half-day SRHD Media Training course. The course focuses on techniques for conducting successful interviews and issues specific to SRHD, including the importance of completing the Media Contact Forms in order to track media interest and coverage of SRHD programs.

The SRHD Media Training course will be offered at least annually, as needed.

Questions

Please direct all questions about this document or media relations to Melanie Rose, Public Information Manager, 324-1688.



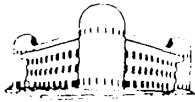
S P O K A N E R E G I O N A L H E A L T H D I S T R I C T

PERSONNEL/EMPLOYEE POLICY No. 200.29

EFFECTIVE DATE: JUNE 29, 2000

SUBJECT: MEDIA POLICY

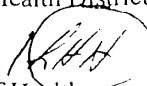
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S P O K A N E R E G I O N A L H E A L T H D I S T R I C T
Memorandum

Date: June 22, 2000

To: Spokane Regional Health District staff

From: Mayor John Talbott 
Chairman, Board of Health

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Subject: Media Policy

The Board of Health is issuing the following policy regarding media contact for the Spokane Regional Health District. The purpose of this policy is threefold: 1) to ensure that Health District policy is uniformly and comprehensively represented to the public; 2) to be proactive in matters of potential legal or political significance; and 3) to keep Board of Health members and the Health Officer informed of Health District media stories.

The Board of Health designates the Health Officer as the media spokesperson. As spokesperson, the Health Officer will respond to all press inquiries and work with the media concerning issues of Health District policy. The Health Officer may delegate this responsibility to staff after review of the inquiry. In appropriate cases, the Health Officer may delegate ongoing responsibility for media response to specifically designated staff who are directly involved in programs where fairly constant informational contact is necessary.

Recognizing the need to be timely and responsive to media requests, staff who are directly contacted by media representatives shall provide notice to the Health Officer or designee, if the Health Officer is unavailable, prior to releasing any information or giving an interview. If neither the Health Officer nor designee is available, Director-level staff may provide interviews on non-policy matters, such as data requests, program activities, and evaluation and assessment results. Matters of Health District policy (e.g., budget planning, strategic initiatives, Board of Health decisions) and stories of community-wide significance (e.g., epidemics, disaster response, major collaborations) shall be the sole responsibility of the Health Officer.

The media is an essential community partner in accomplishing our public health mission. Within the bounds of confidentiality to those we serve, we fully intend to be proactive in our media contacts through the use of press releases, press responses and contacts, and, when indicated, press conferences. The Health Officer will review all press releases and press packets in advance of their release.

All media contacts shall be recorded on the attached form. These forms are to be forwarded to the office of the Health Officer for filing.